

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 HANOI 000909

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR EAP/BCLTV; EAP/RSP; DRL; PM

STATE PASS TO USTR FOR E. BRYAN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [PINR](#) [PREF](#) [MARR](#) [OVIP](#) [ETRD](#) [VM](#) [RELFREE](#) [HUMANR](#) [ETMIN](#) [APEC](#) [ASEAN](#) [WTO](#)

SUBJECT: The Ambassador's April 18 Meeting with Communist Party External Relations Commission Chair Nguyen Van Son

Summary

-----

1. (SBU) The Ambassador met for the first time April 18 with Nguyen Van Son, the Chairman of the Communist Party's External Relations Commission. Chairman Son was optimistic about continued progress in expanding the bilateral relationship, noting that the Party attaches importance to the U.S. role and relations with the United States. On the subject of the Prime Minister's proposed visit to the United States, Son observed that this represented a high-level political decision and would be an important milestone in bilateral relations. The Ambassador underlined continued U.S. support for Vietnam's WTO aspirations, but noted that time is running short. Chairman Son agreed with the Ambassador on the need for continued Vietnamese efforts to tackle corruption and improve rule of law to attract greater U.S. investment. Son also agreed that there is room to expand bilateral cooperation in areas such as counterterrorism and counternarcotics. Son said that the reason for disagreements with the United States on the issues of human rights, religious freedom and ethnic minorities is a "lack of understanding." On the subject of next year's Party Congress, Chairman Son said that the main theme will be strengthening "doi moi" (renewal) and that this will include "political doi moi." In terms of foreign relations, the emphasis will be on "openness and diversity." End Summary.

PM's Visit, WTO Accession, Expanding Bilateral Cooperation

-----

2. (SBU) The Ambassador met for the first time April 18 with Communist Party External Relations Commission Chairman Nguyen Van Son. Pol/C and Director of the External Relations Commission North America Department Nguyen Tien Nhien also attended. (Note: Chairman Son is the Party's equivalent of Foreign Minister. End Note.) The Ambassador opened by noting the remarkable expansion of bilateral relations over the past ten years. The United States and Vietnam are currently looking at the possibility of a visit to Washington by the Prime Minister and are awaiting a green light from the White House. The biggest issue is timing, with the Prime Minister's proposed time slot also sought after by a number of other world leaders, the Ambassador observed.

3. (SBU) We have made good progress in our bilateral discussions on Vietnam's WTO accession, the Ambassador continued, and we forwarded to Washington Vietnam's revised services offer late last week. This represented an important next step for Vietnam to meet its December accession goal, but this prospect becomes dimmer as more time passes. Vietnam not only has to complete negotiations with 20 other countries but also has to pass through its legislature a number of laws to bring itself into compliance with WTO standards, and the Working Party in Geneva will need to see this draft legislation.

4. (SBU) Of course, there is much more to the bilateral relationship than just trade and commerce, the Ambassador noted. Our two countries are working on new agreements related to agriculture, adoptions, maritime issues and other areas in which we can expand our cooperation. One symbolically very important issue is that of cooperation in the area of military education and training, and we are close to reaching an agreement on this. The United States and Vietnam are at the stage where we can take the relationship to the next level and pursue a strategic dialogue on matters of mutual concern. For example, the tension between China and Japan in recent weeks is not in the interests of Vietnam and the United States, and our two countries' leadership should discuss this and other issues when the opportunities present themselves. Furthermore, the questions of how the United States can strengthen further its relations with ASEAN and increase the effectiveness of APEC, and how the East Asian Summit will be established and its agenda decided are important issues where our interests

may well coincide, the Ambassador said.

15. (SBU) Bilaterally, the United States and Vietnam are doing good work in many areas, such as in the fullest possible accounting of our MIAs and cultural and academic exchanges. But we can do more, both bilaterally and multilaterally, in these areas and others related to counterterrorism, counternarcotics and law enforcement cooperation. We are well aware that the bilateral relationship would not have developed as well as it has without the support of Communist Party leadership, and we hope that we can continue to rely on the Party's support for further expansion of relations, the Ambassador emphasized.

Son: Party Values Relations with the United States  
-----

16. (SBU) Chairman Son agreed that continued dialogue and exchanges are important, as there are many issues for both sides to discuss. The Communist Party "always values exchanges and contacts" with the Ambassador and the Embassy for the sake of developing bilateral relations. "We attach great importance to the U.S. role and to the U.S.-Vietnam relationship," Son said.

17. (SBU) On the Prime Minister's proposed visit to the United States, the Chairman noted that this represented a "very important political decision taken by the leadership of Vietnam" in this tenth anniversary year. Vietnam views this visit as an important event in bilateral relations and will work closely with the United States in making all the necessary preparations and arrangements. As for the issue of other leaders' wanting to visit the United States at the same time, this is natural as "the United States is the place most people want to visit," Son said.

18. (SBU) On WTO accession, Son said that Vietnam has a strong commitment to joining the organization and is trying its utmost to achieve this goal. However, it seems that "Vietnam has to do more than others to enter the WTO," Son opined. Vietnam's National Assembly has plans to pass all the necessary laws and regulations for WTO accession and has even "put aside" other work to "wholly dedicate" itself to this task. Turning to overall bilateral economic relations, Son said that U.S. investment in Vietnam has yet to reach its full potential. With Vietnam's economy continuing to grow, there are many fields with "strong potential" for U.S. investment, and Son urged the Ambassador to play a role in encouraging further U.S. investment. Son also expressed his country's gratitude for U.S. support in expanding bilateral education and training cooperation.

19. (SBU) Chairman Son agreed that the United States and Vietnam can achieve better cooperation in other fields and expressed his hope that the United States would offer new initiatives. Vietnam, for its part, will do the same. For example, in the areas of counterterrorism, counternarcotics and anti-organized crime efforts, the two sides can have "more active cooperation." "The Ministry of Public Security is always ready to meet with its American counterparts," Son stressed. Expanded military-to-military relations, represented in part by military education and training cooperation, are also welcome. Vietnam and the Party are ready for dialogue with the United States in many areas, Son said.

Human Rights, Religious Freedom and Ethnic Minorities  
-----

10. (SBU) The Ambassador agreed that increased dialogue at many different levels is welcome. Responding to the Chairman's point on U.S. investment, the Ambassador noted that, while the level of investment appears low, in reality it is three times higher because the GVN figures do not reflect investment funneled through third countries, such as Singapore. That said, the level of U.S. investment is still not where it should be. To a large degree, this is because many American investors want to see how Vietnam's economic reform efforts play out, whether the Bilateral Trade Agreement is respected by both sides and to what extent Vietnam's WTO aspirations move forward. Vietnam is competing with its neighbors for U.S. investment dollars and thus has to create an economic environment in which corruption is stamped out, rule of law is the order of the day and transparency can be relied on. There are positive signs that Vietnam understands the importance of these issues, and once investors feel confident about the situation on the ground in Vietnam, there is a good possibility for an investment surge, the Ambassador observed.

11. (SBU) As the bilateral relationship grows, there will be areas in which the United States and Vietnam do not see eye-to-eye, such as political reform, human rights and religious freedom, the Ambassador continued. However, in recent months we have demonstrated that we can approach these

issues in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding. Much work remains, but, in the area of religious freedom, we are approaching the point where we may be able to move this issue from the negative to the positive side of the bilateral ledger. Vietnam has the proper religious freedom-related policies in place, but implementation is critical, and, with its nationwide network, the Party has an important role to play to ensure that implementation throughout Vietnam is consistent, the Ambassador said.

12. (SBU) Similarly, Vietnam has done some good work to address the problems faced by certain ethnic minority groups in the Central and Northwest Highlands, but more needs to be done to ensure that policies and practices are in place to remove this as an area of bilateral disagreement. For example, the United States places great emphasis on family reunification and the ability to migrate freely, and we hope that Vietnam will allow certain people to leave and join their families in the United States in a routine manner, the Ambassador said.

13. (SBU) Vietnam is actively trying to honor its international commitments, create a more transparent system and fight corruption, Chairman Son stressed. However, Vietnam is not yet a "mature country" like the United States, and Son asked the Ambassador to understand that Vietnam "cannot change overnight." Vietnam is also trying its best to tackle problems related to human rights, religious freedom, ethnic minorities and family reunification and migration. The reason for disagreements with the United States in these areas is a "lack of understanding," and Son urged us to "have more understanding of Vietnam's conditions and work together to strengthen cooperation."

#### Party Congress

14. (SBU) The Ambassador noted that it is important for U.S. leadership to understand how Vietnam and the Party set policy and what their vision for the future is. To that end, it would be useful to learn how preparations for Vietnam's Tenth Party Congress are progressing. Chairman Son replied that the preparations are still at the "grassroots stage," and that the Congress will be held "early next year." The Congress' "main theme" will be the "strengthening of Vietnam's 'doi moi' (renewal)." Part of this will be to "take doi moi further into the field of 'political doi moi' as well as completing the process of building a state governed by law." In terms of foreign policy, the Congress will focus on making Vietnam's relations "more open and diversified," Chairman Son said.

#### Bio Note

15. (SBU) Soft-spoken to the point of being difficult to hear above the din of the air conditioning, Chairman Son is less expansive than other Government and Party leaders we have met. However, he appears to have a good grasp of the issues and seemed sincere in his repeated suggestions for increasing dialogue and exchanges between the Party and the Embassy.

16. (SBU) Brief bio follows:

Nguyen Van Son

Member of CPV Executive Committee, and Chairman of CPV Commission for External Relations

Date of Birth: 1946

Education: BA, Scientific and Social Studies.

#### Work Experience:

1961 - 1962: Worked in movements of Vietnamese youth and students.

1963 - 1966: Joined the Vietnam People's Army.

1966 - 1972: Studied in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

1972 - 1980: Expert in the Party Commission for External Relations.

1980 - 1982: Studied at the Ho Chi Minh National Political Institute.

1982 - 1991: Expert, [then] Deputy Department Director, [then] Department Director of the Party Commission for External Relations. Conducted an international relations study overseas in 1986.

1992 - 1996: Vice Chairman of the CPV Commission for External Relations.

July 1996 - present: Member of the Eighth and Ninth Party Executive Committees, Chairman of the Party Commission for External Relations.

July 1997 - present: Deputy in the Tenth and Eleventh National Assemblies; Member of the National Assembly Commission for External Relations; Chairman of the Vietnam-Laos Congressional Caucus.

End bio.

MARINE